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FURTHER NOTES ON JUSTUS VAN GHENT

THE following may be of interest to those who have read my 'Notes, etc.,' printed in the last number of this JOURNAL. Shortly after my first article went to the press, I happened to visit the ducal picture gallery in Altenburg (Saxe Altenburg). This gallery, among many fine works of Italian primitives, possesses a curious painting on canvas (Fig. 1). It represents, on golden ground, the dead Christ held up by three elderly men. Only the upper half of the body of Christ and the heads of the supporting men can be seen. Over the scene is a banderole, bearing the inscription: *Honor et benedictio crucifixo filio qui nos suo supplicio redimit ab auxilio*.¹ The whole is enclosed by a painted frame which is decorated with flowers, leaves, snakes, and butterflies. In the middle of the bottom part of this frame there is an escutcheon with a crowned standing lion. This last is apparently a later addition to the picture. Although the painting has been terribly damaged and its color is almost entirely gone, so that it produces almost the impression of a monochrome, there is enough beauty in the composition and drawing to make it apparent that the author of it must have been an important master. There is sufficient external and internal evidence, I believe, at our disposal to prove, almost beyond doubt, that this master could have been no other than Justus van Ghent. The account books of the fraternity of Corpus Christi in Urbino (the same for which Justus painted the famous picture at Urbino, the Communion of the Apostles) contain, under the year 1475, the following note: *Giugno . . . E più tela a M^{ro} Giusto dipentore che diceva voler fare un insegna bella per la fraternita* (cf. Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *The Early Flemish Painters*, Ger-

¹ Sic! it should be, of course, "*exilio*."



FIGURE 1. — PIETÀ, BY JUSTUS VAN GHENT. ALTENBURG; LINDENAU MUSEUM.

man edition, p. 190). This means that in June, 1475, our painter received canvas from the fraternity, which he said he would turn into a "beautiful ensign." I think in the Altenburg canvas we have this ensign before us. The Baron von Lindenau, founder of the gallery, received the picture as a premium from a Roman picture dealer whose customer he had been for some time.¹ At that time, *i.e.* in the thirties of the last century, it was attributed to Antonello da Messina. The painting will not fail to impress the student as a banner that was used in religious processions. Especially in Umbria such "gonfalon" were popular, and a number of them, although without exception on a larger scale, have come down to us and can be studied in the hill towns of this province. That it was not intended for framing, is shown by the circumstance that it has a *painted frame*. The decoration of this frame, the flowers, snails, etc., occurs frequently on Central Italian pictures of the period, but never on Flemish pictures. (Cf. the small Madonna of Giovanni di Paolo in Altenburg, reproduced in the catalogue of the gallery, which shows a similar treatment.) The composition is also Italianizing. We can find the same in "Pietàs" of Venetian or Northern Italian origin. The treatment of the hair and draperies is very similar to that in the "Communion of the Apostles" in Urbino and the "Epiphany" in Trevi, which last I published in my preceding article. The Trevi picture, however, is not as fine as the one in Altenburg and betrays a hasty execution. In spite of the several characteristics, which seem to indicate that the picture was painted in Italy,² there is enough in it to show the artist's affinity to Hugo van der Goes. I have in mind the several "Pietàs" commonly attributed to H. van der Goes, some of which were grouped and published by Joseph Destrée in *L'Art Flamand et Hollandais*, 1907, p. 168 sqq. According to a friendly communication of Director Friedländer, of the Royal Print Room, Berlin, there is a replica of this canvas in the Bargello, Florence. I could not find it, how-

¹ This last information, as well as the photograph of the painting, I owe to the courtesy of Professor Felix Becker of Leipsic, the learned editor of the *Künstlerlexicon*.

² The two heads, to the right and left of Christ, bear witness to the artist's acquaintance with the works of Piero della Francesca.

ever, in the catalogue of Supino, nor was I able to secure a photograph of it. It is perhaps worth mentioning that in the old catalogue of Baron von Lindenau the canvas is regarded as a processional banner. It is only natural to suppose that this painting was intended for a Corpus Christi fraternity. No more appropriate subject than the one represented in it could be found for such a work; it is the Body of Christ. The types of the heads afford analogies to the other works of Justus; I have especially in mind the tapestry in Boston, published by me in this JOURNAL in my previous article on Justus.

In the gallery of the castle at Urbino there is a "Pietà" by Giovanni Santi, of pentagonal shape, which could have been inspired by the Altenburg canvas. Especially the prominent place given to the hands and their somewhat gross forms make one think so. This picture is reproduced in Calzini, *Urbino e i suoi monumenti*, p. 118.

Passavant alludes in his *Raffael* (German edition, Vol. I, p. 431) to six small panels with apostles in the sacristy of the cathedral, and to a tempera picture with the preaching of St. John the Baptist in the sacristy of the Oratorio di San Giovanni Battista, both in Urbino. All these, he thought, showed the influence of Justus very plainly. I have not been able, however, to trace these paintings.

The passage in Vespasiano Fiorentino, *Vite di uomini illustri* (ed. Cardinal Mai in *Spicilegium Romanum*, tom. I, Romae MDCCCXXXIX), which is the basis for all our knowledge of Justus' activity in Urbino, runs as follows: "*Della pittura n' era intendentissimo*;¹ *e per non trovare maestri a suo modo in Italia che sapessino colorire in tavole a olio, mando insino in Fiandra per trovare uno maestro solenne, e fello venire a Urbino, dove fece fare molte pitture di sua mano solennissime: e massime in uno suo istudio, dove fece dipingere i filosofi, e poeti, e dottori della cosi greca come latina, fatti con uno maraviglioso artificio; e ritrassevi la sua Signoria al naturale, che non gli mancava nulla se non lo spirito. Fece venire ancora di Fiandra maestri che tessevano panni d'arazzo. . . .*"

The words "*e ritrassevi la sua Signoria*" have been hitherto

¹ Vespasiano is speaking of Federigo da Montefeltre

interpreted "and he portrayed his duchess." This is wrong, however, for it is plain that Vespasiano means "and he por-



FIGURE 2. — MADONNA, BY JUSTUS VAN GHENT. BERLIN; SCHLOSS.

trayed there (*i.e.* in the studio) his lordship," and that he means the portrait now in the Barberini gallery.

The fact that Vespasiano tells us that Federigo made tapestry weavers come from Flanders makes it probable that Justus furnished them with designs. Further research will probably

lead to the recognition of other tapestries than the one published by me, as having been designed by Justus.

Dr. W. R. Valentiner, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, was so friendly as to call my attention to a group



FIGURE 3. — MADONNA, BY JUSTUS VAN GHENT. FLORENCE ; PALAZZO CORSINI.

of pictures, which in his opinion can be safely regarded as works of Justus van Ghent or his pupils. I will first enumerate these works and then give my observations regarding them.

1. Berlin, Königliches Schloss : Madonna and Child.
2. Florence, Palazzo Corsini : Madonna and Child.
3. Rome, Palazzo Corsini : Mater Dolorosa.
4. Philadelphia, Collection of Mr. Johnson : Crucifixion (this panel was formerly in the Kums Collection, Antwerp).
5. Berlin, Kaiser Friedrich Museum (No. 526) : Madonna and Child with donors.
6. Turin, Royal Gallery : Madonna and Child in a Gothic room.

1 and 2 could be by Justus van Ghent (see Figs. 2 and 3). Especially the Berlin picture, when compared to the portrait of Battista Sforza with Guidobaldo Montefeltre on the Urbino "Communion," makes this probable. The fact that there is nothing in these two paintings that would remind one of Italy makes me incline to believe that they belong to Justus' activity before he came to Italy. This is, however, a hypothetical conclusion and, like the attribution itself, is open to discussion. The modelling of the faces and of the hands is similar to that in other works of Justus, although these works impress one as being less mature than, for instance, the Urbino "Communion." The type of the Madonna betrays in these pictures, in spite of reminiscences of Hugo van der Goes, a great deal of individuality.

The "Mater Dolorosa" of the Corsini palace, Rome, is, so far as I can see, also a work of Justus van Ghent (see Fig. 4). The architectural background is Italian (one might think of the architecture of Luciano Laurana, the Dalmatian architect of Federigo), but the Virgin is almost purely Flemish. There is a swing to the drapery, however, that goes beyond the capacity of a local artist of the Netherlands who has not seen works of Italian masters of the Renaissance.

Mr. Johnson's picture is the most remarkable work of art among the paintings listed above (see Fig. 5). It is most delicate in finish, masterly in characterization, and especially successful in the rendering of sorrow. The figure of Christ is almost identical with that on the Boston tapestry (see the

reproduction in my preceding article), where the Crucifixion is represented in the last compartment to the right. The St. John of Boston also resembles the one in the picture in question. The heads of the male figures might have been influenced by Piero della Francesca. This picture is the finest of all the works that can be attributed to Justus and it is in a fine state of preservation.

No. 5 of my list does not seem to justify an attribution to Justus or his school; it is more likely the work of a follower of Roger van der Weyden.

Nor can I see any affinity to Justus' work in No. 6, the small Madonna of the Turin gallery. This picture ap-



FIGURE 4. — MATER DOLOROSA, BY JUSTUS VAN GHENT. ROME; PALAZZO CORSINI.

pears to be earlier than those hitherto considered, and it shows the dependence of its author on the school of Jan van Eyck.

I am aware of the fact that my attributions will probably not meet with the approbation of all students of the problems touched upon in this and the previous article. Still, I indulge in the



FIGURE 5.—CRUCIFIXION, BY JUSTUS VAN GHENT. PHILADELPHIA; JOHNSON COLLECTION.

hope that these articles, which form the first attempt to reconstruct the "oeuvre" of Justus van Ghent, will not be without profit to further research. We know very few individualities among the primitive artists of the Netherlands, while the number of anonymous works is enormous; therefore it seems to me good service to the history of art, to try to add new personalities—and the artistic personality of Justus was a very obscure one, up to the present moment.

MORTON H. BERNATH.

BERLIN, 1910.